

Here is a game to demonstrate the importance of a precise vocabulary.

Potato Game

Divide the children into groups of four. Give each child a potato. Each child writes down a description of its potato. Put the potatoes back into the centre of each group. Read out the descriptions and see if the individual potatoes can be identified.

Ideas

Working from the physical evidence of a site visit, it is possible for quite young children to grasp some difficult concepts. The idea of historical evidence can be introduced. How do we know about the past? What are the different types of evidence and what does each offer? A sense of chronology can be encouraged even if, at first, it is only an understanding of long ago / more recent.

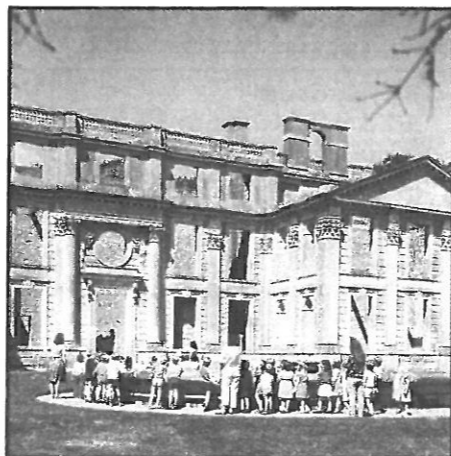
An aesthetic sense can be encouraged. Our sites can generally be touched and texture, colour and form discussed. The sites can be used to stimulate the imagination and develop the ability to empathise with people in other situations.



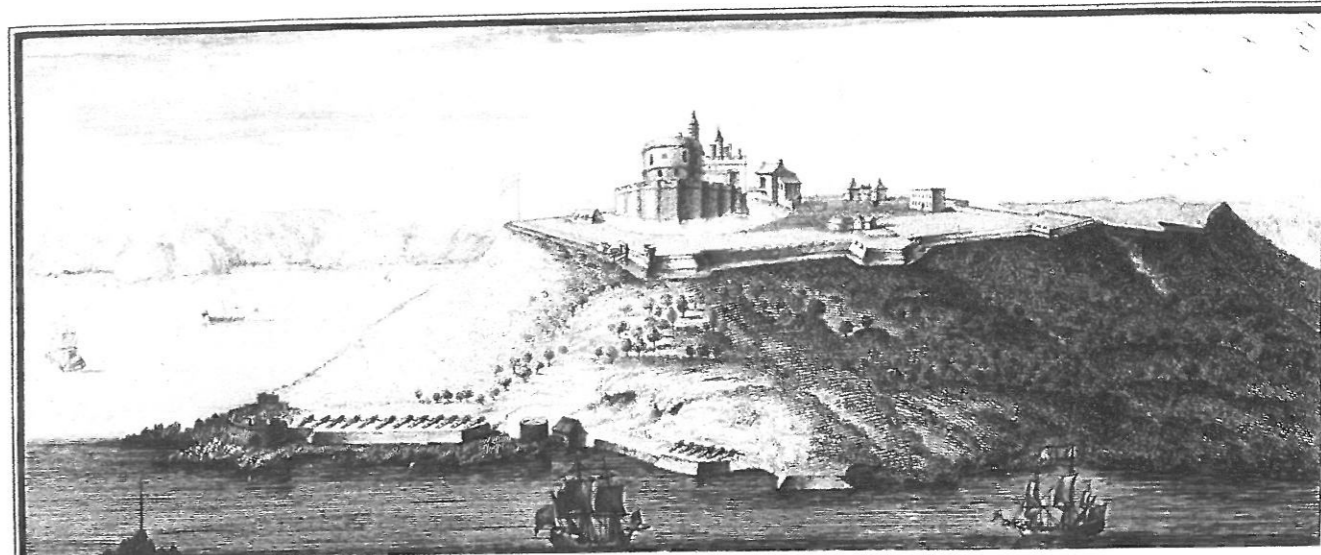
North Leigh Roman Villa, Oxfordshire: coping with Roman technology.



Wroxeter Roman City, Shropshire: the fourth largest town in Roman Britain now largely protected under grass.



Appuldurcombe House, Isle of Wight: country house begun in 1701 in a park landscaped by Capability Brown.



Pendennis Castle, Cornwall: one of the coastal forts of Henry VIII.

Information

What information do you want to get across? First you need to decide where the visit will fit in the sequence of your planned activities. It is to be an introduction, a climax or the central part of your work? The latter will allow you to prepare the children so that important features do not escape their notice and still leave time for you to capitalise on their heightened interest when you are back in the classroom.

Preparing yourself

When you book a free site visit you will be given information about the facilities available for educational groups. Many of our sites have a free information leaflet especially prepared for teachers. Visit the site, study the guide book and if there's an education pack read that, as we have tried to include information and ideas in an easily digestible form.

Preparing the children

Decide what you are going to tell them before the visit and what you are going to let them discover at the site. You might, for instance, talk about life in a castle at school, but leave the children to discover about attack and defence at the site by setting a problem-solving exercise during the visit.

No one visit is going to cover everything. Be selective in your aims and stick with them.

Types of visit to be cautious about

Be cautious of the 'general visit' where the intention is to follow up interest that may develop. If children lack the questions to ask about a site or the skills to observe it then you may be narrowing their horizons rather than broadening them. Think carefully about the purely social visit too. Children will often enjoy the visit more and learn to co-operate and communicate better if they have been given a structured activity.



Sibsey Trader Windmill, Lincolnshire: a brick built tower mill dating from 1877.

Check List

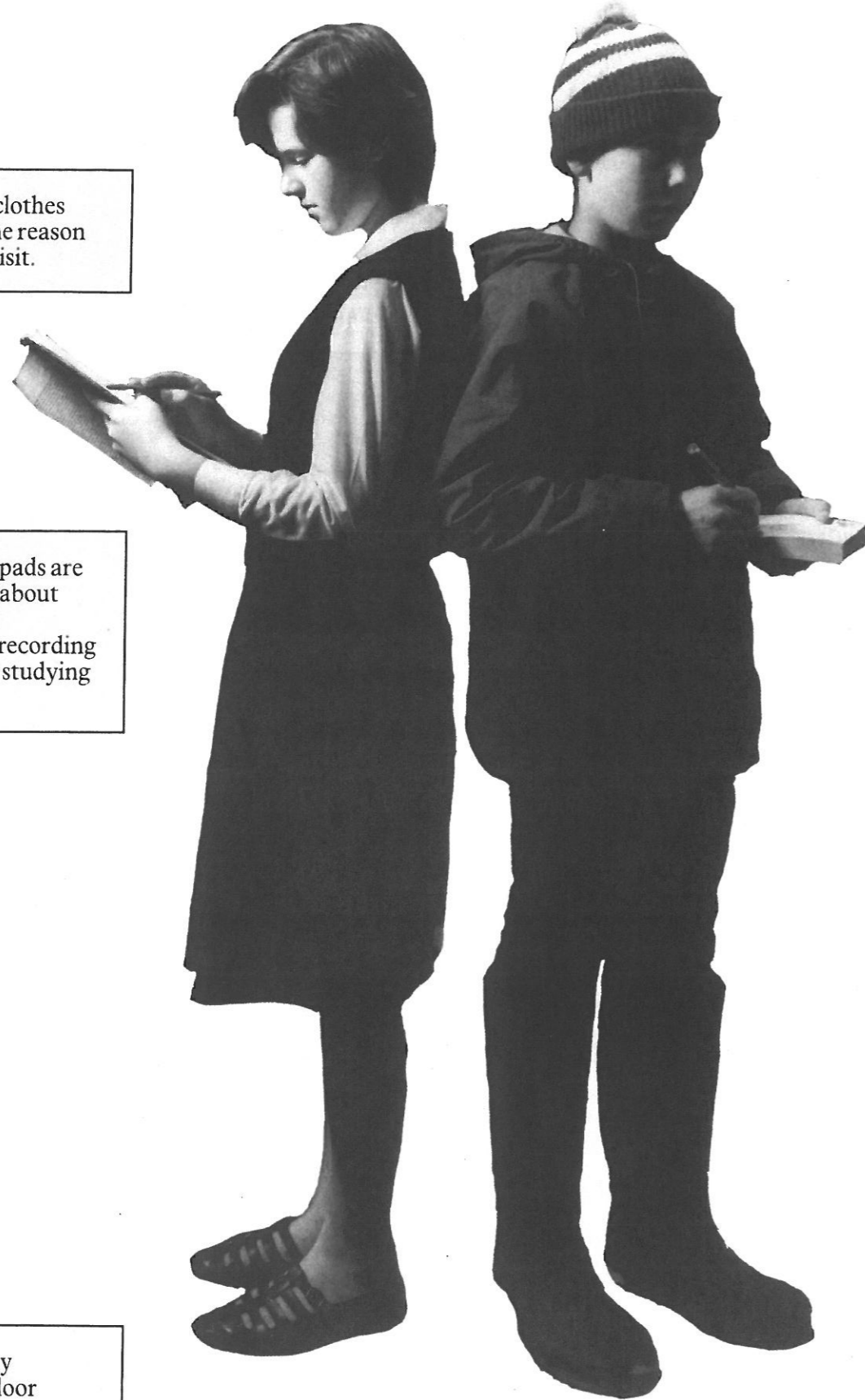
What type of site are you visiting?

Many ancient monuments are draughty places. On many sites you will need out-of-door clothes.

Choosing the right clothes and equipment is one reason for an exploratory visit.

Clipboards and notepads are important but think about taking a camera and measuring tapes for recording work, binoculars for studying building detail.

Remember that many monuments have indoor rooms. Muddy Wellington boots will definitely not be appreciated!



Many sites have earthworks to explore which could be slippery and muddy.



Osborne House, Isle of Wight: inspecting fingernails before Queen Victoria's visit.

Planning a visit: On Site

Organising a visit — the practicalities

You will have started by writing down your aims and the expected educational outcomes.

Choose the site, preferably one near your school, and book a free visit and an exploratory visit for yourself. Go to the site and look at the Education Room, if there is one. Decide what topics you are going to concentrate on and what preparation is necessary for you and your pupils.

Things to look for at the site:

Education Room — if there is an Education Room visit it and examine the facilities. Plan how you might make use of them.

Lavatories — many of our sites have no sanitation. What arrangements are you going to make?

Lunch — most of our sites do not have cafes. Decide on the provision you are going to make.

Shop — is there a shop and are you going to allow time for children to buy postcards etc?

Special needs — are there going to be any problems of access, for example?

Parking — will you have to allow time for getting from coach to site?

Education pack — information leaflets, guide books, slides, videos — what useful material is available?

Vantage points — if you plan a guided tour, what are the safest and most convenient vantage points?

Equipment — do you need to bring cameras, tape-recorders and other equipment?



Gravyards provide a useful resource for teaching observation and recording skills.



Stonehenge, Wiltshire: the most famous stone circles in the world.



Wall Roman Site, Staffordshire: teachers puzzling over the remains of a Roman motel.

Adult Helpers

You may decide to bring some additional adults with you on the day. (We require at least one adult to fifteen children). They will need to be prepared in advance especially if they are not professional teachers. Tell them what you expect of them. Will they be working with a small group? Will they be expected to impose 'control'? Show them the work that is expected of the children and suggest that they merely hint at answers and provide ideas, leaving the children to do the work.

Working on Site

Here are some approaches to working on site that you could consider.

Worksheets

Some teachers love these and others loathe them but they are frequently used for site visits. The test of a good worksheet is whether it acts as an aid to observation. If you could answer it with your back to the site then it has been badly constructed. Are the answers useful? Questions that ask children to count things are generally less useful than the type that asks, for example, how something was made and require deduction from observation.

If you intend to use a ready-made worksheet make sure you have answered it yourself. You will then know whether it is useful and where the snags lie. You will probably need to adapt it for your class.

Some of the best worksheets are the ones designed by teachers for their own classes, especially those which have been adapted and improved with use.

Problem solving and role-play

An alternative to worksheets is to set up a more open ended activity. Give the children a problem in the past, eg 'You are the warden of this castle. You have been warned of an attack. Decide where the castle's weakest points are and what men, weapons and supplies you need to defend it' or in the present, eg 'You have been asked by a travel firm to prepare a trail for tourists round this site. The visit will only be able to stay for 3/4 hour. What route will you recommend and what information will you provide?' In both cases children will be expected to research and record their findings and present their proposals in some predetermined manner. Allow plenty of time for discussion.

Dramatic Reconstruction

This is more ambitious than role-play. Children could have made their own costumes before the visit, eg Roman tunics or Norman armour. Alternatively they could wear something that symbolised the period, eg medieval headdress or sixteenth century ruff. The site could then be used to re-enact one of the events from its history. The drama could be written and rehearsed beforehand or situations could be

improvised on the spot. Either way will require considerable thought and preparation on the part of the teacher.

Creative writing

We have plenty of romantic or atmospheric sites that can be used as a stimulus to creative writing. Poetry and narrative writing are obvious areas but there are also opportunities for empathetic exercises. How, for example, did Saxon villagers feel when an imposing castle was built close to them by the Norman invaders?

Drawing

Good worksheets will include a high proportion of drawing and this can be used as an activity in itself. It is an excellent way to learn about the material world. Understanding of construction comes through the careful observation that drawing demands. It slows children down and helps them learn to use their eyes. Invest the activity with real status and expect high standards.

Measuring and Calculating

The fragmentary nature of some of our sites makes possible activities that could not be done in other settings. Children can measure the rooms of a ruined house and draw a ground plan, then can plot the features of an archaeological site by triangulation or they can make a record of the facade of a building by estimating height and length.



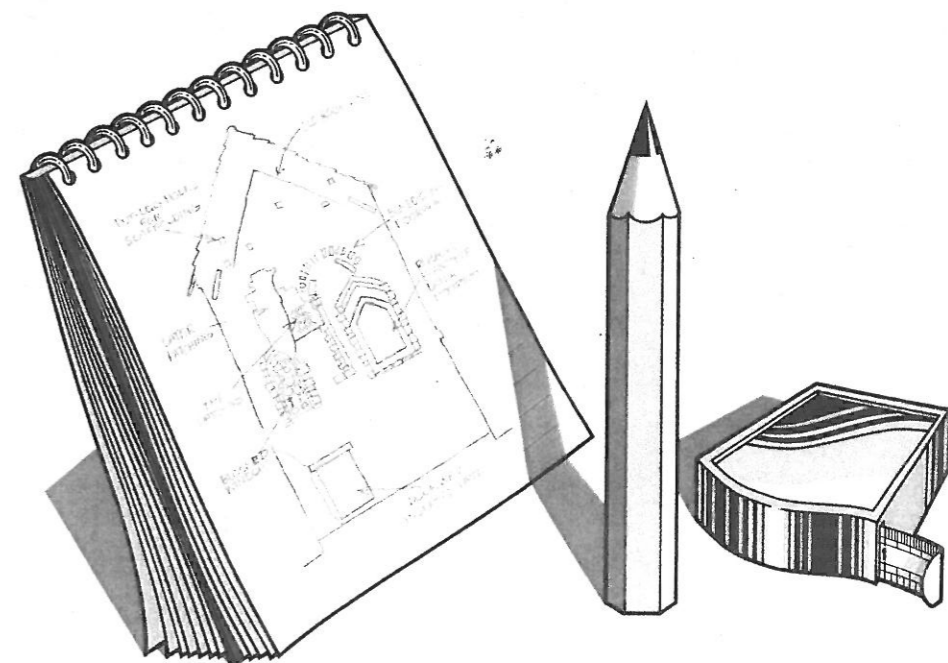
Denny Abbey

Introduce your pupils to the idea of observation — to understand monuments and buildings you need to think and record like a detective. The photograph of Denny Abbey in Cambridgeshire shows how complex archaeology above-ground can be!

Studying the Natural Environment

Make use of the educational potential of the landscape surrounding the site. Look at the building in its setting to see how each influenced the other. To integrate a visit into the curriculum devise scientific studies. Pond dipping is possible at some sites, hedge counting at others, but please check first. Study the flora and fauna, make bark rubbings, compare the differing habits of various trees and use a clinometer to calculate their height. Don't forget to follow the Countryside Code.

If you come up with a good idea for work at a site we would be pleased to hear from you.



Avebury Stone Circles, Wiltshire: the 18th century antiquarian William Stukeley makes an impassioned plea for the preservation of the stones.